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UNCLAS BRATISLAVA 000025

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPT FOR OES, EUR/NCE, EUR/PPD, AND EUR/ACE  
AID FOR EEE AND OSDA  
AGRICULTURE PASS TO FOREST SERVICE  
EPA FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [SENV](#) [EAID](#) [KPAO](#) [AMGT](#) [KSCA](#) [LO](#)

SUBJECT: LOCAL PERSPECTIVE ON FOREST DISASTER

REF: (A) 04 BRATISLAVA 1064, (B) 04 BRATISLAVA 1147

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED - PROTECT ACCORDINGLY

1. (U) Summary. On January 4, Econoff and FSN visited civic leaders in the Tatra region to discuss restoration and renewal efforts in the wake of the recent wind disaster that leveled 250 square kilometers of forest (reftel A). Two of the leaders are also members of the GOS Commission established to coordinate cleanup and reconstruction efforts, which met for the first time on December 13 and will meet again on January 13. All three leaders expressed dismay at NGO criticism of the Commission and were eager to participate in a potential Embassy-hosted DVC in which USG experts could share their experience in areas related to rebuilding destroyed forests. End Summary.

2. (SBU) Jan Mokos, Mayor of Vysoke Tatry, Michal Sykora, Mayor of Strba and chairman of the regional association of towns and villages, and Milan Baran, City Manager of the District of Poprad, shared their ideas of the recovery effort with Econoff and FSN. According to Mokos and Baran, members of the Commission, the GOS is just beginning its work and expects to engineer long-term results. In its first official meeting in December, four working groups were created and assigned to specific duties. First, the Ministries of Environment, Economy, Agriculture, and local governments were tasked with forging a consensus on what to do with the fallen timber, while considering an assessment of how much is salvageable, how much to remove, and how much to leave on the ground. Mokos asserted that environmental groups want most of the wood to be left alone, citing potential flooding problems upon removal, while those with financial interests want simply to sell as much as possible. The local governments would like to at least remove the fallen trees lying within 100 meters of towns in order to reduce potential fire and insect problems. A second group within the Commission was asked to design a secure program to handle any wood that is to be removed. A third was charged with outlining a sustainable redevelopment plan that would eventually be handed over to an NGO for implementation. Finally, a fourth group led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was to calculate the final damages and work toward accessing EU funds to aid the recovery. At the next meeting on January 13, each group will provide an update and, if possible, start to make specific recommendations.

3. (U) All three local leaders showed little regard for the criticism leveled at the Commission from environmental NGOs (reftel B). Baran pointed out that these NGOs are based in the Bratislava and have not even visited the region or met with regional officials to consider local opinions. Mokos averred that the Commission has attempted to be as transparent as possible by being open to media interviews, allowing all voices to be considered, and consulting with forestry and environmental professionals. In addition, local NGOs are already active in coordinating relief funds, assessing damages, and performing impact studies.

4. (SBU) The local leaders were enthusiastic about the USG sharing its expertise during the recovery process. Mokos specifically requested assistance on economic development in environmentally sensitive lands. The Commission is attempting to strike the right balance between maintaining a healthy forest and creating a sustainable, tourist based economy. Mokos suggested that a DVC on the topic would be appreciated but requested that, for public relations purposes, post make the suggestion directly to Prime Minister Mikulas Dzurinda. Mokos additionally solicited a DVC on how to handle public relations after a disaster so that the GOS can better communicate with the media, the public, and NGOs. Baran further expressed interest in sharing information about complex emergency warning systems as well as forest search and rescue procedures.

5. (U) After clarification of the topic and participants, post will send a formal request through the usual channels

for one or more DVCs.

THAYER

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